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## **Baesler: ND Migrant Education Program Has Nation's Top Student**

**BISMARCK, N.D., April 14, 2016** – State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler said a summer migrant education program in northeastern North Dakota has the nation's top student for the second straight year.

Jose Paz Pruneda Jr., who turns 18 this month, is graduating from high school in May. He was recently named as the 2016 National PASS Student of the Year, Baesler said.

PASS stands for Portable Assisted Study Sequence. It is an instructional program designed for students whose families travel during the school year for agricultural work. It is used by North Dakota migrant farm worker children, who often move south for the winter in October and return in late March or early April.

North Dakota's only summer migrant programs are operated at Grafton, in Walsh County about 40 miles northwest of Grand Forks, and Manvel, about 13 miles northwest of Grand Forks in Grand Forks County. Migrant students attend classes at the two schools during June and July.

The 2015 National PASS Student of the Year, Juan Alberto Benavides, and the 2010 honoree, Rubi Gonzales, also took instruction at Manvel, said Sandy Peterson, program administrator for migrant education at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction.

Pruneda, who is Mexican, is fluent in spoken and written English, said Mary Sorvig, the principal of Manvel Elementary School. She and Richard Ray, Manvel's superintendent, are co-directors of the school's migrant instruction program.

Pruneda attends Warren-Alvarado-Oslo High School in Warren, Minn., during the spring and fall months. During the rest of the school year, he lives in San Andres, Mexico, and attends the Cecytle Los Ramones School in Nuevo Leon.

Pruneda is returning to Minnesota from Mexico this month and is on track to graduate from the Warren high school in May. His parents, Jose Pruneda Sr. and Maria Pruneda, have migrated to the Red River Valley for a number of years to work for farmers in the region.

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Jose Pruneda Jr. was chosen as the 2016 Student of the Year from among thousands of migrant students nationwide. The distinction will help Pruneda get college scholarship aid, Sorvig said. "This will open up doors for him. It is like having an award for hard work," she said.

"We just have a very small number of the migrant population in North Dakota," Sorvig said. "To have an award like this, especially two years in a row, is an indication of the excellent education opportunities provided by our schools and state. It also speaks to the caliber of students who migrate here to North Dakota."

Sorvig said the PASS instructional program is designed to allow students to earn high school credits while learning and taking tests at their own pace. Once a student successfully completes a course, he or she moves on to the next course.

At Manvel, students taking the courses are supervised by a teacher but work semi-independently. Sorvig and Sandy Fetsch are Manvel's PASS program teachers.

During the summer of 2015, Peterson said, Grafton's PASS program had 13 students attend, of whom seven completed 10 courses for high school credit. Twenty-one students were PASS students at Manvel, with 19 finishing 25 courses for high school credit. Sorvig said she expects similar enrollment numbers this summer.

The 2015 National PASS Student of the Year, Juan Alberto Benavides, is the son of Juan A. and Aracely Benavides. The family lives in Rio Grande City, Texas, and they migrate to Minto, N.D., for the spring and summer. Aracely Benavides works as a bilingual teacher's aide at the Manvel school during the summer months, and her husband works for a Grafton farmer.

Rubi Gonzales, the 2010 honoree, attended the Midway Public School at Inkster, N.D., and summer school at Manvel. She went on to earn a college degree, and now works as a human resource professional in McAllen, Texas. Gonzales intends to pursue a master's degree in the near future, Sorvig said.

The PASS program was established in 1978 to help provide instruction for migrant farm worker students in California. It offers courses in English, algebra, geometry, biology, world geography and history, environmental science and other subjects.

Thirty states offer PASS programs, according to the National PASS Center, based in Leicester, N.Y., which develops and coordinates course work and offers instructional materials and training.

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